

State Department spells out as “arbitrary detention,” “forced disappearances,” and “extrajudicial killings”; and Cuba, whose government exports repressive tools to countries like Venezuela; and, of course, the People’s Republic of China itself, where the hypocrisy stretches from repression in Hong Kong to internment and torture of the Uighur people in Xinjiang.

The Biden administration has advertised a foreign policy focused on human rights and democracy and quite publicly announced its intention to rejoin the U.N. Human Rights Council. Fine, let Burma and Hong Kong and Xinjiang and Belarus be tests of this administration’s approach to the council. But the White House must not put much trust into this corrupted institution. We should be uniting like-minded democracies around actions that the United Nations panels are either unwilling or unable to take. With respect to Hong Kong, the prior administration took several concrete steps, from closing PRC investment loopholes in Hong Kong to opposing targeted sanctions.

Now is the time for the Biden administration to show its resolve as it confronts serious tests of its own.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. TUBERVILLE. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

MAIDEN SPEECH

Mr. TUBERVILLE. Madam President, I rise today to speak on the Senate floor for the first time as a U.S. Senator from the great State of Alabama.

I want to share some thoughts on how we can work together as a team to improve the lives of our constituents and to provide more opportunity for the next generation of Americans, but before I begin, I want to take a moment to thank the people of Alabama.

For the last 2 years, I have traveled the State, from Mobile to Muscle Shoals, from the Wiregrass to Lake Guntersville, and many places in between. I talked to folks from all walks of life. Mostly, I listened, which is something we can all do better. I listened to people’s hopes, and I listened to their concerns. I heard what they thought was going right in our country and State and what they thought was going wrong, and even after being a football coach my entire career, working day and night, running for the Senate was still the hardest thing I have ever done, but I enjoyed every minute.

In the end, I asked the people of Alabama to trust me with the responsibility of representing them here in Washington, and they did. It is humbling. It is an opportunity to serve my country that I respect, cherish, and

will always honor. My staff and I will work hard every day to live up to that trust.

Like the Presiding Officer, my constituents sent me to Washington to represent them and to help make their lives better. I recognize we all have our differences, but we are all on the same team. We have got an offense and a defense, but at the end of the day, we are still on the same team. One of the things we can do together as a team is to create more opportunity for more people. In my view, that starts with education.

I have been an educator, a coach, and a mentor to young people for 40 years. I recruited 18- to 19-year-olds from all over the country and all walks of life. I saw how they lived. I was a father figure to hundreds of young men who had one or no parents. I coached young people from all backgrounds—rich, poor, and everybody in between. I mentored young people of all races, religions, and economic backgrounds.

As someone who has had a chance to travel across the country and this globe for my career, I have seen how other people live. One thing I have learned is that education is the key to freedom—the key to freedom—the freedom to live the life you want. I have seen firsthand how education can give you a leg up and a way out. It is a way to achieve the American dream. When we empower our young people with a quality education, we give them the gift of an opportunity, the greatest gift our country can give our citizens. And what I found out as a coach is that, when people are given an opportunity to better themselves, they usually take it.

I think I can safely say I have been in more public schools than any Senator ever. Too often, I have found that we are failing our young people by not providing the quality education they deserve. It is not about money; it is about people; it is about what we value and what we teach. Improving education in this country should be one of the, if not the top, priorities we have. That is why I am proud to be a new member of the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee. On the HELP Committee, we need to work together as a team to do three things.

First, we need to recognize that parents and teachers know how to best educate our young people in their communities because we are all different. The Federal Government does not need to tell parents in Alabama how to teach their kids. We don’t need a one-size-fits-all education curriculum. What works in San Francisco will not necessarily work in Scottsboro, AL.

Second, we should recognize that education takes many forms. Not every student in America needs to go to a 4-year college or university. To ensure our country remains competitive in the 21st century, we need to promote STEM education to those students who have an interest in math and science,

but to remain strong, this country also needs welders, plumbers, nurses, equipment operators, electricians, and craftsmen. These are jobs that have excellent pay and great futures. If the Democrats want to pass a massive infrastructure bill, they need to first ask: Who is going to build it? That is why I will be looking for any opportunity to support career technical programs that prepare a skilled workforce. Our goal should be to restore America to a country that makes things again.

No. 3, we have got to start teaching our young people moral values again. That starts with putting God and prayer back in our schools. Our kids need structure, and they need to learn right from wrong. I have watched everything that has happened in education over the past few decades from a front-row seat on my sideline as a coach. It is embarrassing. As a person who chooses to spend their career in education, I now have the opportunity to say something as a U.S. Senator.

Our young people are our No. 1 hope for this country’s future. If we don’t recognize that, we are going to lose our country as we know it. As of 2018, the United States is 13th in the world for reading, 18th for science, and we are 36th in the world for math. That is unacceptable.

This country was built on hard work. It was built on competition, whether it is business or individual. Education and athletics teach you how to compete, how to have grit, determination, and to work together as a team. Now, you can learn everything you want from books, but if you don’t learn to persevere and compete, it is hard to succeed.

Some people in this country think that you are owed something simply because you live in the United States of America. This country doesn’t owe you a job or a paycheck. This country only owes you one thing, and that is an opportunity, but what is great about this country is that it also gives you the opportunity to fail. That might sound a little funny coming from a football coach who spent his entire career trying to win, but here, if you fail, this country will give you a chance to get back on your feet and try to succeed again and again. You don’t get that opportunity in most countries on God’s green Earth.

That being said, I appreciate the opportunity to serve with Chairwoman MURRAY and Ranking Member BURR, and I look forward to getting down to work and returning education to one of our top priorities.

I yield the floor.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The bill clerk read the nomination of Miguel A. Cardona, of Connecticut, to be Secretary of Education.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic whip.

RAISING THE MINIMUM WAGE

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, back in 2017, before anyone had ever heard of COVID-19, our Republican colleagues could hardly vote fast enough for a \$1.9 trillion tax bill. Most of the benefits of that bill went to the wealthiest people in America—\$1.9 trillion in tax cuts, most of it to the ultrawealthy and large corporations. And of course there was little talk about the deficit and the debt when that was going on.

Now we are in the midst of a pandemic, and COVID-19 has killed more than half a million Americans. Americans are hurting. Our economy is hurting. Millions are unemployed. And our friends across the aisle are asking how little we can get away with doing at this moment in time. They want to know how much we can cut from President Joseph Biden's American Rescue Plan. Can we cut money to open schools? Can't we just wait? Let's just wait and see what happens. That is their question. How about cutting funds to help keep families from losing their homes? How about cutting the funds for vaccination sites? How low can we go?

One point nine trillion dollars in tax cuts for millionaires and billionaires—no problem. A President who denies the truth about a pandemic as it rages across America—no problem. But when Americans elect a new President with a mandate and a plan to finally break the back of this pandemic, get our economy back on its feet, get our kids back in schools, and actually help American families, suddenly a lot of folks on the other side of the aisle have lost interest.

Do you remember last year? I do. We discovered this COVID-19 and started to worry about it, as we should. In March of last year, we passed a bill that cost almost \$2 trillion—the largest spending bill in the history of the United States—under President Trump, and it got 96 votes in the Senate—96 votes. Every Democrat and every Republican Senator who voted, voted for it, and I was one of them. Did I stop and say: Wait a minute; President Trump may get credit for this. No. We had an American crisis, a challenge, and we needed to respond to it.

And then what happened in December of last year, while President Trump was still in office? The second COVID-19 rescue plan came through, some \$900 billion. I was one of those who were part of drawing it up, and I voted for it,

no questions asked. We were still in the midst of a pandemic. The economy was flat on its back. I didn't care that Donald Trump was still President; there was work to be done for America. Ninety-two Senators voted for that; 96 in March, 92 in December under President Trump.

Well, how many Republican Senators are now stepping up to help us with the American Rescue Plan that President Biden has proposed? I am still waiting. None so far. Now it has become a partisan exercise to talk about dealing with the real pandemic and economic crisis of this country.

What is going on in this Chamber? Have we decided now, since we have a new President of a different political faith, that the other side cannot support efforts to increase the amount of money for vaccines and distribution across America, to send a cash payment to families who are struggling to get by, to give unemployment benefits to millions of Americans when those benefits are scheduled to run out in just 2 weeks?

All we hear from the other side is: You know, we may be overspending here. We should have thought of this before.

Yes, you should have, and you didn't under a Republican President. Now it has become an issue.

A year ago, at the beginning of the pandemic, 96 to zero for a \$2 trillion COVID relief plan. Maybe if we had had an administration that wisely managed the COVID response, we wouldn't have been in that mess. Maybe if we had had a President who for the first year of this coronavirus wasn't making up stories that it is going to go away; it will disappear by Easter; it won't be a problem if everybody would just take a shot of Lysol; a new chemical I have discovered some of my friends are taking and all the rest—remember that? Remember those press conferences? And what was going on while the last President was ignoring the reality of that COVID-19 pandemic? America was getting sick, and Americans were dying.

We have 5 percent of the world's population and 20 percent of the COVID-19 deaths. What is going on here in a great nation like America? Well, for a year, we didn't get it together because we didn't have a President who accepted reality. Now we have a President who accepts reality and wants to do something about it. He was elected to lead, and he wants to lead.

Where is the Republican support? Democrats were there for the Trump plan; Republicans aren't there for the Biden plan. We wasted time and resources, but now President Biden wants to turn it around.

The American Rescue Plan, proposed by President Biden and passed by the House of Representatives last week without a single Republican vote, no Republican support for it, has the support of 80 percent of the American people—overwhelming majority of Democrats and Independents, even Repub-

licans. It turns out the only people in America who are against this approach of taking this pandemic seriously are the Republicans in the House of Representatives and apparently in the Senate.

Every day this Senate delays passing the Biden American Rescue Plan, more small businesses close their doors, workers lose their jobs, parents turn to food banks and soup kitchens to feed their families, and more and more families face homelessness.

One provision that was included in the House version of the American Rescue Plan will not be part of the Senate plan, and that is the gradual increase in the Federal minimum wage.

Now, I understand. The rules in the Senate, particularly when it comes to reconciliation, as conceived by the late Robert C. Byrd, are almost impossible to understand and defend. I get it. I am not blaming any one person for that. That is a reality, and I have been here for a while, and I have seen it. So currently we cannot offer the Federal minimum wage under the so-called reconciliation bill because of the Byrd rules.

Our Senate Parliamentarian ruled last week that passing a Federal minimum wage increase as part of the rescue plan is not permitted under those rules. I respect the Parliamentarian's judgment. I may disagree and I may be disappointed, but I respect her judgment. Our Republican friends should know this, however: Senate Democrats aren't going to give up on raising the minimum wage. The issue is not going away.

Do you know how long it has been since we raised the minimum wage in America? Twelve years. Twelve years. The Presiding Officer knows that. That is the last time we increased the Federal minimum wage.

Twenty-nine States have done something about it, but 21 have not, and we don't have a change in the Federal law. That is the longest that our Nation has ever gone without raising the minimum wage since Congress created that wage in 1938.

During this pandemic, billionaires—people like Jeff Bezos, Elon Musk, Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg—they have done pretty well. They have seen their net worth increase by billions, even tens of billions of dollars. How about middle-class families? What do they see? They see their savings dwindle, and they find it almost impossible to make ends meet.

Fortunately, as I said, many States are acting. Washington is not. In 29 States, including Illinois, the State minimum wage is higher than the Federal minimum wage. The Federal minimum wage is \$7.25 an hour. In Illinois, our State minimum wage is set to reach \$15 an hour by 2025, just like the Biden plan. Most States that have increased their minimum wage have done so because their State legislatures have come to the rescue. Some States, like Missouri and Arkansas, raised the minimum wage by ballot measures.